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Monday, 3 April, 2000, 20:08 GMT 21:08 UK

US fears terrorist attack in Kosovo



K-For has stepped up security measures in Kosovo

By Nick Wood in Kosovo

US officials have come under criticism over a raid by K-For military police on an Islamic relief organisation in Kosovo last weekend.

The police, who were acting on a tip-off from US officials, raided a house rented by the Saudi Joint Relief Committee (SJRC).

The operation followed fears of a possible terrorist attack on the US office in the province.

US security officials say they believe members of the SJRC are linked with Osama bin Laden, the man suspected of being behind the attacks on the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

In a separate incident British soldiers blew up a suspect car belonging to an employee of the charity.

The owner had stuck an SJRC sticker to his windscreen.

Neither incident revealed any evidence that could link the group with any terrorist activity.

Suspicious photos

K-For officials say the operations were part of increased security measures introduced after two members of the group were supposedly seen taking photos near the US office and

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K-For headquarters in Pristina.

New vehicle checkpoints have been introduced in the area, and visitors to both compounds are obliged to enter on foot.

It is not the first time the US officials here have raised concern about the charity.



Osama bin Laden:
Allegedly linked to the
charity

Before Christmas a warning was given of a possible threat to US citizens in Kosovo.

Secret document

In a document seen by the BBC in Pristina, US officials called on the UN police force in the province to undertake open surveillance of the group.

Marked "Secret: US office only - Release to UNMIK" the report names two former members of the charity.

It claims Adel Muhammad Sadiq Bin Kazem, and Wa'el Hamza Jalaidan, the Committee's former Director, are "associates of Osama bin Laden" and that Mr Jalaidan helped Mr bin Laden "move money and men to and from the Balkans".

The claims are being strongly denied by the group.

A spokesman for the group says they were "stunned" by the raids, and are awaiting an explanation from K-For.

They have also offered to open up all their files for K-For or police officials to look at.

Bad publicity

The Relief Committee works as an umbrella body for several Saudi NGO's including the Saudi Red Crescent, and has a multi million-dollar budget partly financed by the Saudi government.



It works with the UNHCR and the World Food Programme, and has worked with K-For on the rebuilding of several schools in the province.

Some K-For and UN officials say the US is concerned with avoiding American casualties in the run-up to the presidential elections



The group's Assistant Director, Faisal Alshami, said he was disappointed at what he saw was an attempt to paint his organisation in a bad light.

"We have spent a lot of money here, trying to help people, we really hope this is not an attempt to curtail our work" he said.

Privately some K-For and UN police officials say the US is highly concerned about "force protection", or avoiding US casualties, in the run-up to presidential elections later this autumn, and is reacting to even the slightest threats.

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